

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

KEITH MARTEL JONES,

Plaintiff,

v.

CAMDEN COUNTY CORRECTIONAL  
FACILITY; CAMDEN COUNTY POLICE  
DEPARTMENT; THE CITY OF CAMDEN;  
CAMDEN COUNTY SHERIFF'S  
DEPARTMENT,

Defendants.

HONORABLE JEROME B. SIMANDLE

Civil Action

No. 16-cv-08383 (JBS-AMD)

**OPINION**

APPEARANCES:

Keith Martel Jones, Plaintiff Pro Se  
803 Engard Ave. 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Pennsauken, NJ 08110

**SIMANDLE, District Judge:**

1. Plaintiff Keith Martel Jones seeks to bring a civil rights complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against the Camden County Correctional Facility ("CCCF"), Camden County Police Department ("CCPD"), the City of Camden, and Camden County Sheriff's Department ("Sheriff's Depart."). Complaint, Docket Entry 1.

2. Section 1915(e)(2) requires a court to review complaints prior to service in cases in which a plaintiff is proceeding *in forma pauperis*. The Court must *sua sponte* dismiss any claim that is frivolous, is malicious, fails to state a

claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. This action is subject to *sua sponte* screening for dismissal under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) because Plaintiff is proceeding *in forma pauperis*.

3. For the reasons set forth below, the Court will dismiss the complaint without prejudice for failure to state a claim. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(b)(ii).

4. To survive *sua sponte* screening for failure to state a claim, the complaint must allege "sufficient factual matter" to show that the claim is facially plausible. *Fowler v. UPMS Shadyside*, 578 F.3d 203, 210 (3d Cir. 2009) (citation omitted). "A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged." *Fair Wind Sailing, Inc. v. Dempster*, 764 F.3d 303, 308 n.3 (3d Cir. 2014). "[A] pleading that offers 'labels or conclusions' or 'a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not do.'" *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)).

5. Plaintiff brings this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983<sup>1</sup> for alleged violations of Plaintiff's constitutional rights. In order to set forth a *prima facie* case under § 1983, a plaintiff must show: "(1) a person deprived him of a federal right; and (2) the person who deprived him of that right acted under color of state or territorial law." *Groman v. Twp. of Manalapan*, 47 F.3d 628, 633 (3d Cir. 1995) (citing *Gomez v. Toledo*, 446 U.S. 635, 640 (1980)).

6. Generally, for purposes of actions under § 1983, "[t]he term 'persons' includes local and state officers acting under color of state law." *Carver v. Foerster*, 102 F.3d 96, 99 (3d Cir. 1996) (citing *Hafer v. Melo*, 502 U.S. 21 (1991)).<sup>2</sup> To say that a person was "acting under color of state law" means that the defendant in a § 1983 action "exercised power [that the defendant] possessed by virtue of state law and made possible only because the wrongdoer [was] clothed with the authority of

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<sup>1</sup> Section 1983 provides: "Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State . . . subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress . . . ." 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

<sup>2</sup> "Person" is not strictly limited to individuals who are state and local government employees, however. For example, municipalities and other local government units, such as counties, also are considered "persons" for purposes of § 1983. See *Monell v. N.Y.C. Dep't of Social Services*, 436 U.S. 658, 690-91 (1978).

state law." *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 49 (1988) (citation omitted). Generally, then, "a public employee acts under color of state law while acting in his official capacity or while exercising his responsibilities pursuant to state law." *Id.* at 50.

7. The Complaint must be dismissed with prejudice as to claims made against CCCF because defendant is not a "state actor" within the meaning of § 1983. See *Crawford v. McMillian*, 660 F. App'x 113, 116 (3d Cir. 2016) ("[T]he prison is not an entity subject to suit under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.") (citing *Fischer v. Cahill*, 474 F.2d 991, 992 (3d Cir. 1973)); *Grabow v. Southern State Corr. Facility*, 726 F. Supp. 537, 538-39 (D.N.J. 1989) (correctional facility is not a "person" under § 1983).

8. The Complaint must be dismissed as to the claims against the City of Camden as Plaintiff has not pled sufficient facts to impose liability on this defendant. "There is no *respondeat superior* theory of municipal liability, so a city may not be held vicariously liable under § 1983 for the actions of its agents. Rather, a municipality may be held liable only if its policy or custom is the 'moving force' behind a constitutional violation." *Sanford v. Stiles*, 456 F.3d 298, 314 (3d Cir. 2006) (citing *Monell v. N.Y.C. Dep't of Social Services*, 436 U.S. 658, 691 (1978)). See also *Collins v. City of Harker Heights*, 503 U.S. 115, 122 (1992) ("The city is not

vicariously liable under § 1983 for the constitutional torts of its agents: It is only liable when it can be fairly said that the city itself is the wrongdoer." ).

9. Plaintiff must plead facts showing that the relevant Camden County policy-makers are "responsible for either the affirmative proclamation of a policy or acquiescence in a well-settled custom." *Bielewicz v. Dubinon*, 915 F.2d 845, 850 (3d Cir. 1990).<sup>3</sup> In other words, Plaintiff must set forth facts supporting an inference that Camden County itself was the "moving force" behind the alleged constitutional violation. *Monell*, 436 U.S. at 689. As Plaintiff may be able to amend his Complaint to address the deficiencies noted by the Court, the Court shall grant Plaintiff leave to amend the complaint within 30 days of the date of this order.

10. The Complaint also must be dismissed without prejudice as to the claims against the CCPD and CCSD because they are not legal entities separate from Camden County and are therefore not independently subject to suit. See *Bermudez v. Essex Cty.*

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<sup>3</sup> "Policy is made when a decisionmaker possess[ing] final authority to establish municipal policy with respect to the action issues an official proclamation, policy, or edict. Government custom can be demonstrated by showing that a given course of conduct, although not specifically endorsed or authorized by law, is so well-settled and permanent as virtually to constitute law." *Kirkland v. DiLeo*, 581 F. App'x 111, 118 (3d Cir. 2014) (internal quotation marks and citations omitted) (alteration in original).

D.O.C., No. 12-6035, 2013 WL 1405263, at \*5 (D.N.J. Apr. 4, 2013)(citing cases). "There is no *respondeat superior* theory of municipal liability, so a city may not be held vicariously liable under § 1983 for the actions of its agents. Rather, a municipality may be held liable only if its policy or custom is the 'moving force' behind a constitutional violation." *Sanford v. Stiles*, 456 F.3d 298, 314 (3d Cir. 2006) (citing *Monell v. N.Y.C. Dep't of Social Services*, 436 U.S. 658, 691 (1978)). See also *Collins v. City of Harker Heights*, 503 U.S. 115, 122 (1992) ("The city is not vicariously liable under § 1983 for the constitutional torts of its agents: It is only liable when it can be fairly said that the city itself is the wrongdoer."). A complaint must plead facts showing that relevant policy-makers are "responsible for either the affirmative proclamation of a policy or acquiescence in a well-settled custom." *Bielewicz v. Dubinon*, 915 F.2d 845, 850 (3d Cir. 1990). In other words, a plaintiff must set forth facts supporting an inference that Camden County itself was the "moving force" behind the alleged constitutional violation. *Monell*, 436 U.S. at 689. "[A] city police department is a governmental sub-unit that is not distinct from the municipality of which it is a part." *Jackson v. City of Erie Police Dep't*, 570 F. Appx. 112, 114 n.2 (3d Cir. 2014) (citing *Monell*, 436 U.S. at 694). Thus, CCPD and CCSD are not distinct from Camden County, and the Complaint asserts no

facts alleging that Camden County was the "moving force" behind an alleged constitutional violation.

11. The Complaint also must be dismissed for failure to state a claim. Plaintiff states he was detained in the CCCF on the following dates: September 1998 to May 10, 1999; July 24, 2001 to March 26, 2002; January 10, 2008 to January 29, 2010; June 22, 2014 to October 31, 2014; and August 5, 2015 to October 12, 2016. Complaint § III.

12. In his complaint Plaintiff states: "you being housed at the Camden County Correctional Facility I was forced to sleep on the floor lying next to the toilet. It was 4 men cramped up in a cell that was built for just 2 people. I was continuously stepped on and on one my cell mate fell out of the top bunk and fell on me." Complaint § III.

13. Even accepting these statements as true for screening purposes only, there is not enough factual support for the Court to infer a constitutional violation has occurred.

14. Plaintiff's cursory and conclusory allegations are insufficient, without more, to state a claim for relief. In order to make out a plausible claim for relief and survive this Court's review under § 1915, Plaintiff must plead something more than "labels and conclusions" and allege enough facts to support a reasonable inference that defendants deprived him of a constitutional right. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678. For a pretrial

detainee, this means Plaintiff must plead facts showing that the conditions he encountered shock the conscience and thus violated his due process rights. *See Hubbard v. Taylor*, 538 F.3d 229, 233 (3d Cir. 2008) (noting due process analysis requires courts to consider whether the totality of the conditions "cause[s] inmates to endure such genuine privations and hardship over an extended period of time, that the adverse conditions become excessive in relation to the purposes assigned to them."). Some relevant factors are the dates and length of the confinement(s), whether Plaintiff was a pretrial detainee or convicted prisoner, etc.

15. Moreover, to the extent the complaint seeks relief for conditions Plaintiff encountered during periods of confinement ending prior to November 9, 2014, those claims are barred by the statute of limitations and must be dismissed with prejudice, meaning that Plaintiff cannot recover for those claims because they have been brought too late. Civil rights claims under § 1983 are governed by New Jersey's limitations period for personal injury and must be brought within two years of the claim's accrual. *See Wilson v. Garcia*, 471 U.S. 261, 276 (1985); *Dique v. N.J. State Police*, 603 F.3d 181, 185 (3d Cir. 2010).

"Under federal law, a cause of action accrues when the plaintiff knew or should have known of the injury upon which the action is



based." *Montanez v. Sec'y Pa. Dep't of Corr.*, 773 F.3d 472, 480 (3d Cir. 2014).

16. Plaintiff alleges the events giving rise to his claims occurred during multiple different incarcerations from September 1998 to May 10, 1999; July 24, 2001 to March 26, 2002; January 10, 2008 to January 29, 2010; June 22, 2014 to October 31, 2014; and August 5, 2015 to October 12, 2016. However, all but one of these incarcerations occurred more than two years prior to the filing of Plaintiff's complaint. The allegedly unconstitutional conditions of confinement at CCJ, namely the overcrowding, would have been immediately apparent to Plaintiff at the time of his detention; therefore, the statute of limitations for Plaintiff's claims arising from his incarcerations from September 1998 to May 10, 1999; July 24, 2001 to March 26, 2002; January 10, 2008 to January 29, 2010; and June 22, 2014 to October 31, 2014, expired well before this complaint was filed on November 9, 2016. Plaintiff therefore cannot recover for these claims.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Although the Court may toll, or extend, the statute of limitations in the interests of justice, certain circumstances must be present before it can do so. Tolling is not warranted in this case because the state has not "actively misled" Plaintiff as to the existence of his cause of action, there are no extraordinary circumstances that prevented Plaintiff from filing his claim, and there is nothing to indicate Plaintiff filed his claim on time but in the wrong forum. See *Omar v. Blackman*, 590 F. App'x 162, 166 (3d Cir. 2014).

17. As Plaintiff may be able to amend his complaint to address the deficiencies noted by the Court, the Court shall grant Plaintiff leave to amend the complaint within 30 days of the date of this order. However, in the event Plaintiff does elect to file an amended complaint, he should focus only on the facts of his confinement from August 5, 2015 to October 12, 2016. Complaint § III. Because Plaintiff's earlier claims are barred by the statute of limitations and must be dismissed with prejudice, Plaintiff may not assert those claims in an amended complaint.

18. Plaintiff should note that when an amended complaint is filed, the original complaint no longer performs any function in the case and cannot be utilized to cure defects in the amended complaint, unless the relevant portion is specifically incorporated in the new complaint. 6 Wright, Miller & Kane, Federal Practice and Procedure 1476 (2d ed. 1990) (footnotes omitted). An amended complaint may adopt some or all of the allegations in the original complaint, but the identification of the particular allegations to be adopted must be clear and explicit. *Id.* To avoid confusion, the safer course is to file an amended complaint that is complete in itself.<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

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<sup>5</sup> The amended complaint shall be subject to screening prior to service.

19. For the reasons stated above, the claims against the CCCF are dismissed with prejudice. The claims arising from Plaintiff's September 1998 to May 10, 1999; July 24, 2001 to March 26, 2002; January 10, 2008 to January 29, 2010; and June 22, 2014 to October 31, 2014 confinements are barred by the statute of limitations and therefore are also dismissed with prejudice. The remainder of the complaint is dismissed without prejudice for failure to state a claim. The Court will reopen the matter in the event Plaintiff files an amended complaint within the time allotted by the Court.

20. An appropriate order follows.

September 27, 2017

Date

s/ Jerome B. Simandle

JEROME B. SIMANDLE

U.S. District Judge